

# The Dead Guy Interview

**Amelia Earhart**  
(1897-1937)

WITH  
MICHAEL A. STUSSER

**BELATED OBITUARY:** Amelia Earhart was one of the world's most daring and celebrated aviators. After working as a nurse's aide in Canada during World War I, Earhart took up flying as a hobby and eventually set dozens of speed and altitude records, becoming the first woman to fly solo across both the Atlantic (in 1932) and the Pacific (in 1935). In 1937, she attempted to break another record by setting out on a 22,000-mile, around-the-world doozy with her navigator Fred Noonan. They never made it home.



**MENTAL\_FLOSS:** I read in your autobiography that your first real airborne experience was on what you called a “rolly coaster.”

**AMELIA EARHART:** Oh, yes! My sister and me and Uncle Carl [Amelia's father's brother, Carl Otis] built a mini-rollercoaster at our house in Kansas. It had rails that came down off the roof of the tool shed. It was about an 8-foot drop! We'd grease the tracks with lard and go flying on a wooden crate into the street!

**MF:** How'd you get the aviation bug, anyway?

**AE:** I saw a flying exhibition when I was about 20. That got my juices flowing. Then my dad—who didn't have much money—paid 10 bucks for us to take a 10-minute ride over L.A. I was hooked after that.

**MF:** Were you a daredevil?

**AE:** You kinda had to be with the planes we were flying. Still I was careful. The only time Neta [Neta Cook, Amelia's primary teacher and one of the few female flight instructors in the world] got upset was when, instead of going above some high tension wires, I went between 'em.

**MF:** Did you have any nicknames?

**AE:** When I did stunt flying in air rodeos they called me the *Aviatrix*.

**MF:** Amelia!

**AE:** And “Lady Lindy,” of course.

**MF:** Tell us about your trans-Atlantic flight—the first ever for a woman.

**AE:** I might as well have been a sack of potatoes. Bill Stultz and Slim Gordon did all the flying. We went from Newfoundland to Wales and it took us 21 hours, but I just sat there.

**MF:** Still, people went nuts.

**AE:** That's true. They threw us a ticker-tape parade and we got to meet *President Coolidge at the White House. I stole an ashtray.*

**MF:** Your solo flights are legendary. You were the first person to fly from Hawaii to the mainland. Ten men died trying that route. What were you thinking?

**AE:** Mostly that I had to go to the bathroom. That flight took 19 hours. Can you hold it for 19 hours?

**MF:** Doubt it. Your solo flight across the Atlantic in 1932 didn't go exactly as planned...

**AE:** You can say that again. I was shooting for Paris, but lousy weather put me in an Irish farmer's cow pasture instead. I asked this terrified little fellow

where the hell I was, and he says, “In Gallagher's pasture.” And I'm thinking, “Yeah, real helpful.”

**MF:** You inspired women to break new ground, but you were also quite the fashionista.

**AE:** I liked the leather look, you know? I started by designing flying suits, but created my own fashion line “for the woman who lives actively.” I also looked damn good in a dress.

**MF:** You and your husband (publisher George Putnam) were quite the team.

**AE:** I used to say our partnership had “dual control.” I'd do the flying and Georgie would create the hype—lecture tours, book deals, that sort of thing. We even created a licensed luggage line.

**MF:** You know, he wrote a beautiful biography about you after you died (*Soaring Wings*).

**AE:** I'm dead!?! [Pause.] Just kidding.

**MF:** Rumors about your last flight have you still stranded on a desert island in the South Pacific, captured by the Japanese, or living as a housewife in Jersey. So what really did happen to you?

**AE:** We simply ran out of gas, dear. It's a long way from New Guinea to Howland Island. That's what made it all so exciting!

**MF:** I think I'll take the bus.

**AE:** To each her own. 🙌